



ENDORSEMENT QUESTIONNAIRE 2022

Johanna Lopez

**Running for
Florida House of Representatives
District 43**

Candidate Information

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1. What motivated you to run for this position?

Four years ago, after spending 20 years as a teacher and union member, I decided to run for the Orange County School Board because our youth needed a voice, someone who was not afraid to stand up for their well-being. With our youth's help, in 2018, I was humbled to be elected to represent our community, becoming the first ever Latina to serve as a member of the Orange County School Board.

Since, as a School Board member, I've prioritized the health and safety of our students in the wake of a deadly pandemic, fought for higher wages for teachers and other school personnel, and advocated for inclusive policies and practices to serve our diverse student body. In these four years, I've also unfortunately seen how the Florida legislature has put our children and families at risk, from denying the ability of local governments to determine whether students should wear masks to openly attacking immigrant youth. So, I am running for the Florida House because our children and families need an advocate who is ready to vocalize their needs and forge a more inclusive future for our state.

2. What does being an ally or advocate for the LGBTQ+ community mean to you?

Being an ally and advocate for the LGBTQ+ community means standing up to protect the community in all spaces. As an Orange County School Board member I have worked to ensure that our schools are safe places for LGBTQ+ kids, particularly our trans kids that have come under the attack of transphobic elected officials in recent years. On a personal level, I have always advocated for the respect of LGBTQ+ rights in Florida and across the country.

3. Please summarize your history of community involvement. This may include city boards, civic associations, non-profits, etc.

Being involved in my community and advocating for its wellbeing has been one of my main driving forces. As a teacher for Orange County Public Schools I worked to help my students be prepared for AP testing and I also put a lot of focus in supporting ESOL students so they too could take advantage of all the opportunities they could.

This work eventually led to me being named teacher of the year in Florida and shortly after with the encouragement of my students I ran to be an Orange County School Board Member and won with the support of my community. In addition to my work in the school board, I served as part of the executive leadership team of Alianza for Progress, a C4 organization that works to advocate for Puerto Rican and latino immigrants in Central Florida. I have also served in multiple organizations that focus on education like Voces Unidas por la Educacion, Familias Presentes: Estudiantes Excelentes, Maestros Puertorriquenos en accion and the Orange County Classroom Teachers Association.

4. Please summarize any work you have performed in the past five years to further LGBTQ+ rights. This may include paid positions, volunteer work, and donations.

Protecting LGBTQ+ rights has been one of my priorities not only as an elected official but as an advocate. In the last 5 years I have raised my voice against the homophobic and transphobic rhetoric coming from Tallahassee and from governor Ron DeSantis. When the don't say gay bill was brought up I went to several news outlets to call it out for what it was, an attempt to erase and silence our LGBTQ+ community. I have also supported the efforts of other organizations like Equality Florida.

Questions

5. **The rise in anti-LGBTQ+ legislation barreling down from Tallahassee has caused a sharp increase in discrimination and violence against the LGBTQ+ community in Orange County. How would you go about reducing discrimination in your district or local community? How would you measure your progress?**

The recent hateful and harmful legislation against our LGBTQ community coming from Tallahassee is a disgrace to our state and has caused tremendous damage to the LGBTQ+ community. In order to reduce discrimination, the first thing we must do is reverse this hateful discourse and instead amplify a message of inclusion and respect for our LGBTQ+ community. We must also make sure that we work tirelessly to repeal legislation like the don't say gay bill so we can ensure that at all levels our students feel free to talk about their identity and their families instead of creating rejection in our schools. Lastly we must make sure that we work to pass other laws to protect LGBTQ+ employees in the state to make sure that they cannot be fired on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity. We can measure progress on all this work in different ways. There are tangible indicators like number of hate crimes or discrimination incidents and then there are non-tangible indicators like the type of discourse coming from our institutions that inherently affects our LGBTQ+ community.

6. **Elected officials and office staff are still woefully under-educated on the transgender community. This means that the services their offices provide are often ignorant of the needs of the transgender community. What actions would you take to ensure that the services your office will provide will be educated on and cognizant of the needs of the transgender community?**

It is of the utmost importance to me that my office can support our LGBTQ+ community, particularly our trans community. I will make sure that my staff is not only trained and prepared to serve our transgender constituents but that they are also aware of the situation our trans community is facing in our state so we can better provide resources and solutions.

- 7. The Florida Republican Party is leading the country in stripping away LGBTQ+ rights, starting with our children. Students are having their lives and livelihoods placed at risk by laws such as the Transgender Sports Ban, the so-called Parental Bill of Rights, and now Don't Say Gay. These shamelessly discriminatory bills are forcing LGBTQ+ families to reconsider their future in Florida. What would you tell the parents of LGBTQ+ children in your district who feel they need to leave Florida in order to protect their children?**

First of all, as a parent myself, I completely understand the need and desire to do everything to protect our children and give them the best quality of life we possibly can so while I cannot stop a parent from taking that decision, I would let them know that we are fighting tirelessly against these anti lgbtq+ politicians and pieces of legislation that attack the rights of our LGBTQ+ children. If I am elected to the legislature I will be an unapologetic advocate for LGBTQ+ rights and I will fight every legislative session to repeal laws like the don't say gay bill that hurt our community and hurt the rich diversity that makes Florida a better state

- 8. The Trevor Project's 2022 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health found that 45% of LGBTQ+ students seriously considered attempting suicide and 1-in-5 LGBTQ+ attempt it. How would you lead on this issue and work to decrease these statistics over the course of your term in office?**

As a legislator I will work hard to make sure that we expand healthcare coverage, specifically on the area of mental health and support and I will advocate strongly so that our LGBTQ+ youth can get the help that meets their needs. Outside of legislation, I think it is also important that we foster an environment in our community that supports our LGBTQ+ and works intentionally to make sure we are more inclusive and to reject homophobic and transphobic discourse.

- 9. The same survey by The Trevor Project found that nearly all transgender and non-binary students have had to worry about their access to gender-affirming healthcare, bathrooms, and sports teams being taken away from them. How would you work to take this fear off their shoulders so that they can go back to just being kids?**

The first thing is to recognize the struggle of our transgender and non-binary students and understand that we need actual policies that can improve their quality of life. As a legislator I will work to make sure that government buildings and schools offer gender-neutral bathrooms, I will also fight to repeal legislation that prevents our trans kids from participating in sports while also working to block any new legislation of the same type that comes to the floor. Lastly, I will advocate for the increase of mental-health resources available to our trans youth to receive help with things like gender dysphoria and bullying. The most important thing is to work so that our trans kids can go back to being kids and live a healthy and happy life.

- 10. Far-right groups are pushing to ban books on any topic they find disagreeable, such as books on Black history and experiences, immigration, the LGBTQ+ community, climate change, etc. Do you support these book bans? If not, what is your plan to counter them and ensure students have access to a full array of age-appropriate knowledge and experiences?**

I actively oppose banning books that teach America's history and provide a diverse perspective to our students. As a teacher and school board member I know how important it is that our kids have access to information and that they learn to see the world from a lens of diversity and inclusivity from an early age. As a legislator I will fight against any effort that looks to ban any books that are harmless for our kids.

- 11. During a town hall in your district, a constituent describes being gay or transgender as a "lifestyle choice." What is incorrect about their description? How would you constructively respond in this situation?**

This description is incorrect because gender identity and sexual orientation are not a matter of choice but rather a matter of who we are as persons from the moment of birth. In order to constructively respond to this, I would first make sure to address the core issue of the person's comment and then take time to address the comment from an educational standpoint. Many times comments as these come from a place of ignorance and not plain homophobia and transphobia so I would take a moment to reason with that person and provide information that may help change their point of view.

- 12. During a board meeting, the board chair purposely refers to a transgender woman as "he" and "him" as the woman attempts to give her public comment. The woman corrects the board chair each time, insisting that her pronouns are "she" and "her." The board chair continues to misgender the woman until she eventually leaves the chamber in tears. How would you respond in this situation?**

There are three steps I will take in this situation. The first is to publicly correct for the record the correct pronouns whilst still in the board, the second would be to take a moment to raise awareness of the damage that misgendering people in our community can do. Lastly I will make sure that my office or staff can either get the person to wait so I can address their concerns later on directly and apologize for the incident or if they cannot wait then to obtain their contact information and invite them later for a private meeting to listen to their concerns.

- 13. A parent approaches you at an event, insisting that her son's teachers have "groomed" him into liking boys. Her son is at her side when she says this. How do respond to the parent's statement such that the young boy leaves feeling better about himself?**

The first thing I would do is let the parent know that as a parent, I understand having concerns about their son's education but that as a teacher I can assure him that our role is to support students and make sure we listen to their feelings and concerns and make them feel welcome so their learning experience is positive. I would let them know that all kids should have a right to a good education regardless of their sexual orientation and that we cannot change things that come to us from the moment of birth, but we can work so that every kid has a good and inclusive experience in school.

- 14. Orange County continues to embrace urban sprawl, despite a plethora of data that links urban sprawl to severe strains on our housing, employment, healthcare, and public transit systems (to name a few). What are your thoughts on Orange County's growth? What could Orange County in terms of development that would better serve the communities in your district?**

We need to build more homes in highly dense communities, rather than continue urban sprawl. This would not only allow us to protect our environment but also lower rent and home prices, helping us tackle the housing affordability crisis in Central Florida.

- 15. Do you support the idea of constructing more multi-family homes in neighborhoods traditionally zoned for single-family homes? What impact would this have on your district?**

Yes, we have a housing affordability crisis in Florida. Constructing more multi-family homes and getting away from single-family home zoning will help us make homes more affordable for families in our district. I support that.

- 16. Homeowner Associations often prevent homeowners from transitioning their lawns away from non-functional grasses such as turf and towards sustainable options such as native Florida plants and edible landscapes. HOAs insist that moving away from the traditional pristine green lawn would lower housing prices. What is your opinion on this issue?**

We have a housing affordability crisis in Florida and we need to use all of our tools to make this happen, including transitioning toward more sustainable and cost friendly options for our lawns such as using native Florida plants and edible landscapes.

- 17. What are the top environmental concerns you are seeing in your District and what are the solutions you plan to bring forward if you were elected?**

Air pollution and the contamination of our coasts and water supply which affect the entire state. In order to combat air pollution I will advocate for stricter standards for corporations and I will also support cleaning up our coasts and rivers and measures that prevent contamination to our waters. I will also support measures like a ban on offshore drilling and fracking.

18. Contributions are typically linked to poor environmental policies being passed. Are you pledging to stay away from any particular contributions?

Yes, I am pledging to not receive donations from the fossil fuel industry.

19. Understanding our economic position, how do you plan to localize and strengthen our food system?

We need to end food deserts in our communities, improve funding for nutritional programs in our schools and community centers, and fight in support of programs like WIC and food stamps.